

The New York Times

ART REVIEW

The Armory Show: Playing It Safe During an Unsettled Time

Another year, another crisis: The Armory Show proves resilient again as it opens amid the coronavirus outbreak. Our critic surveys the fair's many welcoming entry points.



Inside the Armory Art Show, running through March 8 at Piers 90 and 94, in Manhattan. Credit...Jeenah Moon for The New York Times

By Martha Schwendener

March 5, 2020

Last year [the Armory Show](#) weathered a crisis when Pier 92 over the Hudson River [was condemned shortly before the art fair opened](#), precipitating a last-minute reshuffling of booths and the shutting down of a satellite display. This year, the fair has settled on Pier 90 and Pier 94 (dress for the outdoor walk between them) and the catastrophe is the coronavirus, which had already forced the cancellation of [Art Basel Hong Kong](#) last month. Though the Armory Show has opened smoothly, hand sanitizer stations are everywhere and elbow-bumping has replaced handshaking and air-kissing as the greeting du jour.

But what about the fair itself?

It's a solid one — if on the safe side — with lots of painting rather than complicated installations or technology. Fairs are not merely commercial ventures. Sections here that have been organized by curators affiliated with prestigious museums (like Anne Ellegood and Jamillah James, both of the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles) demonstrate the increasingly porous divide between profit and nonprofit.

Given the election season and the state of the world, the Armory Show has a sizable amount of activist art. Will these artistic gestures have an effect on policy? Who knows. Like many counterintuitive aspects of our moment, maybe the next revolution will kick off inside an art fair. Here are some themes and strains (pun cautiously intended) that caught my attention.

Politically Minded Displays

My first glance at the fair was on Super Tuesday, so I was in a mind to contemplate art's relationship to power and electoral politics. A fine older art work in this vein is [Edward and Nancy Kienholz's "The Caddy Court" \(1986-87\)](#), consisting of [a 1978 Cadillac that has been sutured to a 1966 Dodge van](#) and filled with animal skulls, antlers and other curios. This deliciously unsubtle commentary on justice and American history was brought into the fair by Ms. Ellegood, who organized the section of the fair called Platform. It is presented by L.A. Louver mid-**Pier 94**. Ms. James organized the fair's Focus section, which includes [Umar Rashid's](#) tough and uncompromising display at [New Image Art \(Booth F19, Pier 90\)](#). The paintings, drawings and sculptures of that artist (also known as Frohawk Two Feathers) consider the violent history of colonialism and pulls no punches: One work has text that reads, "Colonialism Is State Sponsored Terror."

[June Edmonds's](#) dark, seemingly abstract paintings at [Luis De Jesus Los Angeles \(Booth 827, Pier 94\)](#) are actually based on flags and their palettes are derived from a spectrum of black and brown skin complexions. [Whitfield Lovell's](#) hand-drawn images of African-American men and women (based on photographs taken between the 1860s and 1960s — the era between the Emancipation Proclamation and the Civil Rights Movement — at [DC Moore \(Booth 515, Pier 94\)](#) are paired with found objects that reference personal memories. [Viktor Popović's](#) photographic display at [C24 Gallery \(Booth F21, Pier 90\)](#) combines old postcard images of the Croatian coast, when it was a popular leisure spot, with new photographs of these same sites in postwar decrepitude — a simple but effective visual essay on the lasting effects of war.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/05/arts/design/armory-show-art-fair.html>